

November 19, 2014

U.S. citizens need passport to enter country

Q. My Auntie in New York is coming to visit our family for Christmas. She just became a U.S. citizen and she has her naturalization certificate. What documents does she need to come to Jamaica now that she's a U.S. citizen? Can she travel just with her naturalization certificate? Is there a limitation as to how long she can stay outside of the U.S. without losing her citizenship?

Congratulations to your Auntie! And this is such a good and timely question! With holiday travel coming up, there are a lot of Jamaicans who are expecting visitors from the United States, as well as a lot of U.S. citizens living in Jamaica who are planning to go to the States for the holidays. In both cases, travelers need to make sure to have the correct valid documents for their holiday travel plans.

Many people mistakenly believe that once they have naturalized they can travel into and out of the United States with just their naturalization certificate and their Jamaican passport. That is NOT the case! Since 2008 all U.S. citizens MUST have a U.S. passport to be allowed to enter the United States.

If your Auntie traveled to Jamaica with just her U.S. naturalization certificate, she would not be able to board her plane back to the U.S. She would have to come to the Embassy to apply for a passport in order to return home. Issuing a new passport takes at least a week, so this could extend her holiday much longer than she had planned!

The good news is that she can apply for a U.S. passport before she leaves the United States – an application should have been included with her naturalization certificate. Passport applications are also available online at www.travel.state.gov, and in post offices and government buildings across the United States.

Now that your Auntie has naturalized, she is a full citizen of the United States. Green card holders (also known as “Legal Permanent Residents” or LPRs) have limitations on how long they can stay outside of the United States without putting their status at risk. Once a person has naturalized and taken the oath of citizenship, however, they cannot lose their citizenship just by being outside of the country for a long period of time. How long your aunt can stay in Jamaica is up to the Jamaican government, but she does not need to worry about losing her U.S. citizenship by staying in Jamaica for a visit.

It's also important to know that U.S. citizens must enter and exit the United States on their U.S. passports. Jamaicans who have naturalized often also have a Jamaican passport which they can use to enter Jamaica or travel to other countries, but if you are also a U.S. Citizen you MUST have a valid U.S. passport to travel to the United States. Now is a great time for families with U.S. citizen children (or parents!) to double check and make sure that all their passports

are valid ahead of holiday travel plans to avoid any unpleasant surprises or problems. If you discover that a family member needs to renew their passport, the U.S. Embassy still has appointments available and will be happy to process a passport renewal for you. Generally, if you come in and apply for your new passport in the next few weeks you should receive it in time for holiday travel. Passport appointments are made at the U.S. Embassy's website at www.kingston.usembassy.gov, under the "U.S. Citizen Services" tab.

You can find more information about how to travel to the U.S. on our website, www.kingston.usembassy.gov. Keep on top of Embassy news on our Facebook page, [The Department of State has temporarily disabled hyperlinks](#) and by following @USEmbassyJA on Twitter. We also answer general visa questions on our Facebook and Twitter pages.